3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

was in the case of Yakub Beg, the Khokandi adventurer who led a successful revolt against the Chinese in 1865 and ruled the country after the traditional manner of the Oriental despot for the next twelve years. Under his tyranny, according to Stein,[1] the population of some of the oases sank to one-half of what it had once been, and the cultivated area everywhere shrank greatly. The result was that when in 1877 the Chinese came back in force, they were welcomed with open arms by the people and the power of the self-styled "Amir" collapsed like a house of cards.

Nothing is more impressive than the persistence with which through the ages China has enforced her claim to Eastern Turkistan. Whether to safeguard the transcontinental "Silk Road," which in the palmy days of Imperial Rome carried the produce of her looms to the Atlantic shore, or whether because she must extend her effective occupation to the westernmost mountain barriers of her empire on pain of losing their protection, China has always returned to the charge, even after a thousand years. Despite the gigantic distances involved—for even now, with several hundred miles of railway to help, the journey from Peking to Kashgar takes five months—her armies have time after time pushed westward; the might of the Emperors of Cathay has leant up against the flimsy structures of one Central Asian power after another and has flattened them out as though they had never been.

Since their last re-conquest in 1877 the Chinese have governed Sinkiang, the "New Dominion," from Urumchi fifty marches north-east of Kashgar. Standing on the site of Bishbaligh, one of the chief centres of the Uigur civilization in the Middle Ages, Urumchi commands the vital Kansu-Shensi corridor leading from Central Asia into the heart of Inner China. Cut off from the rest of China, except for this one long trail, by the vast extent of the Mongolian Desert, where a man may travel for fifty days without meeting a single human being, the New Dominion has recked little of the civil wars which during the last twelve years have rent the mother-country from end to end. The only effect on Sinkiang of the Revolution of 1911 and the consequent weakening of the Central Government has been to permit a Governor of outstanding ability to establish himself as the virtually independent ruler of Chinese Central Asia. The result of Yang Tseng-hsin's twelve years' rule has been that the military and other

[1] "Journal of the Royal Geographical Society," June, 1925, p. 498.

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636 brigands who infest Kansu, Szechwan and other western provinces are unknown in Sinkiang, which a European may traverse unescorted and unmolested from end to end. Conditions, indeed, vary in the different districts according to the energy and efficiency of the Magistrate of the time. Like crows round a corpse, thieves flock to a district to which an opium-smoker has been appointed, while they desert that of an energetic "Amban" as rats a sinking ship; but in general it may be said that life is safe everywhere and property as secure as in most European countries. Moreover, to Governor Yang and his subordinates must be given credit for what is probably a higher degree of prosperity and contentment than the country has known, at any rate since ancient times. They do not make the mistake of crippling agriculture by oppression and otherwise killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. They come of a race which has two thousand years of administrative experience behind it, and knows well how to base its power upon the strong rock of agricultural prosperity. Oppression exists, but it is chiefly by Turki minor officials, and the District Magistrate is usually there to appeal to in case of need. The predecessors of these same "Begs" were far more rapacious in the days of Yakub Beg, who was of the same class and type as themselves. Then, there was no appeal. Instances of serious and prolonged oppression by Chinese officials under the present régime are rare. A notable case in our time was that of General Ma Titai, the history of whose crimes and of the doom which avenged them will be found in a later chapter. [651] With the exception of land revenue, the taxation is almost entirely indirect; the incidence of the former is light, even taking into consideration the varying proportions over-collected by the Ambans for their own pockets; while the taxes on internal trade are farmed by Turki contractors who, like the Begs, dare not go too far in the mulcting of their own fellow-countrymen. [161] At any rate, the fact remains that the population is steadily increasing and every year more and more land is being taken into cultivation. 311 631 We saw the process going on in several of the districts we visited, notably in Maralbashi, Posgam and Karakash.[1] District

[1] Already the Merket subdivision of the Maralbashi district, two marches down-river from Yarkand, is too big to be administered effectively from Maralbashi, and there is talk of its being erected into a separate third-class district, just as was done a few years ago with Posgam when it was separated from Karghalik, a new bazaar built and a third-class magistrate installed.

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927 AF13 Northwest China
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other's sleeve. The Qazaq woman frequently accompanied her husband, dressed in her best black quilted coat, and wearing a white cotton headdress swathed round the chin with a kind of gorget which becomingly framed the broad tanned face.

Our excursions round the town led us in every direction through rough and muddy streets. The weather was hot and the flies innumerable. This was a natural consequence of the season, which was that of the ripe melon, and the habit of the populace which was to buy a slice, eat the pulp, and then throw the rind away by the roadside. In some places the mounds of discarded peel reached to the eaves of the low houses, while dense swarms of flies buzzed gaily around. The wells were all flush with the ground, and we were never allowed to drink water which had been drawn from them. A wide rapid river flows outside the city, and is surmounted by an imposing rocky cliff, on which stands a pagoda. Beyond this are the trees of the Governor's park, which enclosure contains a life-sized statue of himself. The character of the masses of the Chinese population is distinctly different from that of the large towns within the Great Wall. These are colonials, and inevitably differ from the dwellers in the homeland, even though tenaciously adhering to its every manner and custom. On arrival, according to etiquette, a formal call was paid to the Governor's wife, by whom we were very graciously received. Governor Yang also came in, sat down with us, and talked on many subjects. He asked several questions concerning the journey we had taken, and showed great interest in the educational work which we had accomplished in Shansi. The policy of this strong autocratic ruler is that of complete segregation of his people from the turbulent nations which surround them. To

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this end he allows no newspaper to be published in his territory, and the postal, telegraph and wireless offices are under the control of his appointed censors. News from the outside world filters through but slowly, and all restaurants are posted with the announcement: '*No political discussions allowed.*' It is certainly to Governor Yang's credit that the roads of Turkestan are notably free from brigandage, and during the past decade of civil war in China, Turkestan has remained peaceful. At the time of our visit the whole Yamen was busy with preparations for the journey to be shortly taken by the Governor's son and suite to the town of Zaisan in Russian territory, where the young man had been appointed Chinese Consul.

We were the first British women who had ever visited Urumchi, and our application for passports to cross the Russian frontier at Kuswun created a precedent. Three years previously some of our boxes were stolen from a Kansu inn, and our British passports were lost with them. The papers with which we now travelled were passports written in the Chinese language, and issued by the Chinese Foreign Office and British Consul in Hankow. These documents refer to us by our Chinese names only. We had early made application for permits to travel across Russia, which request had been forwarded to Moscow by the Soviet Consul in Urumchi, and on the day after our arrival word came that this permission was granted, when we immediately presented ourselves to make personal application for a visa. This was duly affixed to the Chinese passport, and all possible help and information with a view to making the journey easy was given to us by the Consular Staff.

The weeks of our stay were very happy and interesting and the time passed only too quickly ere arrangements